



French and Francophone Studies Thesis Guidelines



A thesis is not required for the major in French and Francophone Studies; students may opt to write a senior essay, complete an oral history project or take two seminars to fulfill the capstone experience. Many majors, however, embrace the thesis experience for the opportunity it provides to conduct research and write in depth (and in French) under the close guidance of a member of the department. You also get academic credit for it equivalent to a course. We offer here the following advice so that this exciting and challenging experience may be as successful and rewarding as possible.



1. Process and product. The thesis in French and Francophone Studies is NOT defined as a product labored over in isolation and handed in on some pre-determined due date. It is a process of **intellectual exploration and revision**, particularly given the challenges of grammar, syntax and vocabulary that extended writing in a second language entails. The thesis culture at Bates is often contrary to this approach: your friends may regale you with tales of torturous, sleepless nights, tapping away under mountains of dog-eared books and empty coffee cups. Such a life does not produce cogent, readable, French prose. Plan ahead.

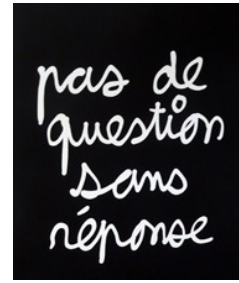
2. Trajectory. In order to assist you better in avoiding this scenario, we impose several parameters so that gradual progress is made, particularly in the initial phases of the writing. It is best to start putting thoughts on paper earlier rather than later in order to think and reason in writing and practice the grammatical and analytical skills that will bloom over the course of the semester. To this end, here are several due dates for those beginning a thesis in the Fall:



3. Junior year, spring and summer: identify a topic:

Ideally at this time, you are thinking ahead to thesis and preparing ideas. Students studying abroad often use their work from that experience, developing it further. They may become enamored of a certain author, for example, a literary movement or cultural issue that they wish to explore in depth. It is never too early to be thinking about topics. With email, you are never too far from a potential faculty advisor. Call in please.

4. **Thoughts on topics.** It is a misguided conception that just because something is written in French it may count as a thesis in French. We are a faculty trained in literary, cinematic, and cultural studies and it is usually through the analytical lenses of literary, cinematic and critical theory that we engage our material and a wide array of issues encompassing race, gender, colonialism, postcolonial states, national identity, immigration trends and cultural encounters, social transformation and the raise of new cultural practices and ways of seeing.

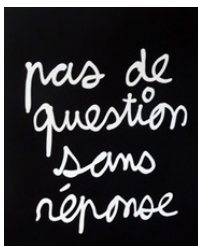


While our work is often in dialogue with the discourses of anthropology, sociology, history and art and visual culture, our theses primary sources and analytical frameworks tend to remain embedded in a French and Francophone cultural studies tradition focusing on cultural representations, be they fiction, poetry, documentary film, critical theory or other. It is best to check in early with your (potential) advisor to see if your direction meshes with their thinking and expertise.

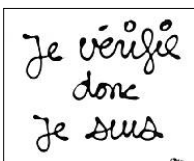
5. **French.** One of the most salient features of both your major in French and Francophone Studies and your thesis experience is the development of analytical thinking and fluency in a second language. Producing a lengthy work in French can be both exhilarating and daunting. Thus some tips:



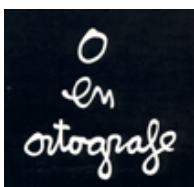
- Seek the assistance of our foreign language teaching assistant for help. They are not on call: try to respect their office hours and plan ahead when making appointments. They are there to assist you, NOT to write your thesis. It is easy to tell when you've given your voice over to someone else. Hang on! Work with each other to craft a thesis in your own voice and analytical framework!



- Avail yourself of the style sheet for paper writing available through the department: it is taken from the Collins Robert French-English dictionary and can be useful in finding helpful French phrases and expressions that help unlock certain ways into your arguments.



- Use French spell check. It exists. It is not the role of your advisor to have to wade through spelling mistakes that a machine could take care of ahead of time.



- Stop in at the Student Writing and Language Center (SWLC <https://www.bates.edu/student-writing-language-center/>). You will find there students who not only know French well but can often be of great help conceptually.

- Careful and voracious readers make for better writers. Pay attention to the style and syntax of the authors that you are reading (both primary and secondary sources). Take note of recurring mistakes and of exceptionally clear and successful passages in your writing and learn from them.

6. **Don't be a stranger.** No news is no news. You should schedule a weekly meeting with your advisor to be checking in and should not avoid contact if and when you hit a difficult period. We are here to help. This is a commitment for us as well and remaining engaged and consistent is the best policy, even when you reach those inevitable moments of (temporary!) despair.



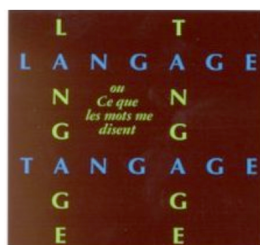
A vos claviers!

Allez-y!...



Your thesis should demonstrate some of the following analytical principles that guide research in French and Francophone Studies

- cultural competency: ability to evaluate and interpret cultural differences beyond stereotype
- ability to contextualize francophone cultures socio-historically
- ability to describe, narrate, express abstract ideas with advanced proficiency in French
- proficiency in research and citation in the field
- proficiency in “reading”: written texts, film, media, photography, theatre
- evidence of a critical, methodological “toolbox” for appreciating, decoding, analyzing, francophone texts
- knowledge of the history of the francophone world, across time periods and geographic and political location
- self-knowledge and awareness: self-reflexiveness about one’s own subject position and that of others



C'est seulement en s'écrivant que quelque chose se produit, dans tous les reus du terme. Ce qu'il y a pour moi de fascinant, c'est que ce quelque chose est toujours infiniment plus riche que ce que je me proposais de faire.